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ABSTRACT

Teachers who use cooperative, integrated methods will produce students more competent in problem solving techniques, communicating effectively, and working cooperatively with others. Benefits of an integrated curriculum include: (1) reaching students with different learning types; (2) developing critical and divergent thinking skills in students; (3) creating a broad foundation that will support students as they moved to more focused subjects; (4) longer retention of material; (5) teaching skill, such as reading, in a subject context; and (6) a closer relationship to what students experience outside the classroom. Also, combining subjects allows for a larger time block that better accommodates cooperative learning techniques, such as group retellings, the buddy system, research grouping, tutorial grouping, and social groupings. For example, a fifth grade social studies unit on the United States Civil War would be enhanced by integration of literature and use of cooperative learning methods. Tying social studies, reading, and language into one curriculum and working in cooperative learning groups will allow all students to excel, because it allows for many different styles of learning. (ND)

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Curriculum:
To Integrate or Not to Integrate

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At a time in our educational process where there is constant turmoil over what is best for the students of America, the voices of experts in our field stress the need for changes in teaching methods. Most of them feel that if we want to have children be successful is school, we need to use methods that involve many subjects. Effective teachers do not treat students as empty receptacles waiting to be filled-students that put out very little effort in the process of learning (Fuhler,1992). Effective teachers use various forms of integrated learning. Teachers using cooperative, integrated methods will produce students that will become competent in problem solving techniques, communicating effectively, and working cooperatively with others (Solomon, 1989).

By using integrated subject matter a teacher is able to reinforce what is being taught, because it more closely resembles the way things happen in real life. There is no area that the student must deal with that is totally segregated from another. Integrated, or cross curricular, lessons help students to learn because they bridge gaps by reaching students with all different learning types. These types of lessons can appeal to the kinesthetic, visual, or auditory learners (Maute, 1989). Lessons that are integrated will also help develop critical and divergent thinking skills in the students as well.

If the integrated lessons are combined with cooperative learning techniques, students can reach a more positive level of learning. According

to studies done by Slavin and Tyrell, there are many important successes achieved when cooperative learning is used, one of which is and increase in social attitude and behavior. It has also been suggested that the social interaction in cooperative groups contributed to academic learning, rather than hurting it. Cooperative learning in an integrated setting allows the student to concentrate on individual learning strengths and subject preferences (Tyrell, 1990). For example, when I use this type of group learning in my classroom I can put students that are strong in reading but weak in art skills together with one that has the opposite qualities. A shy student can be partnered with one that will involve them successfully in the project to help build self-esteem.

The current education reforms that are being written about in the many professional journals are stressing the importance of student centered integrative approaches to subject matter. The challenge is to take many things into account when planning the lessons. The teacher must think of the student's needs and coordinate them within the plan. The proof that this type of curriculum approach is successful is found in studies that show students involved in integrated studies perform as well or better than students involved in separate subject classrooms on standardized tests.

The goal of teaching social studies is to have students who can understand the present through their knowledge of the past. The goal is

attainable if we bring some meaningfulness to our lessons (James 1990). This can be done by bringing student's prior knowledge into the lessons and building on current events in relation to the topics being discussed. Trade book that follow the current themes can be substituted for basal readers and supplement the text with more interesting reading.

The integration in the curriculum reflects the fact that there are connections and overlaps among the subject areas. the use of integrated subject areas form a broad foundation. This type of foundation will support the students as they get into ever narrowing areas of focus in later years (Forsyth , 1992). If children are to learn history it must come alive for them. There is a need to stimulate the children in a manner that makes them curious about the world around them. Literature is a natural way to do this. By using literature, teachers can extend the children's knowledge of the past and help tie it into the present. Imagine the possibilities of teaching the Civil War with the use of skits, poems, stories, and research projects done by the children.

Classroom teachers, professionals, experts, and common sense suggest reasons for using trade books to promote social studies learning. Trade books should supplement the social studies curriculum. There is such a wide variety of material available on different reading levels that, as students become more able readers, they are better able to gather information on their

own. This will encourage them to become more independent learners (McGowen and Guzzetti, 1991).

Using an integrated and cooperative approach to teaching will be very beneficial to the students. Since every situation that the student meets will be integrated in their every day life, this method of teaching will allow the student to be more successful in a classroom and outside of it. Educators believe that using this method of teaching will allow the material to stay with the student for a longer period of time. If these educators are right, social studies, reading and language form a natural bond. Once a topic of instruction is chosen, trade books, fiction and nonfiction on various reading levels, can now take the place of basal readers. Skills that must be mastered according to the course of study, can be taught in the combined context of the social studies and reading lessons. Combining subjects also allows for a larger time block that better accommodates cooperative learning techniques, such as group retellings, the buddy system, research grouping, tutorial grouping, and social groupings.

Using trade books presents the information in a new light. Integrating the trade books with the text books presents a different perspective to the students. It allows for an opportunity to discuss, compare, and contrast the material. Is it fact or fiction? For example, the Civil War period in the fifth grade social studies texts lends itself easily to this form of instruction. There

are many trade books both fiction and nonfiction that deal with the theme. When making final choices of the books be sure to check out the main characters , the story line, and the research done by the author to insure accuracy in the nonfiction books. The books touched on later incorporate realistic people that will expand the students understanding of the emotions that drove children and adults to become involved in the war-no matter which side they supported. The chosen books can then be assigned in small interest groups or for whole class instruction. Goals can be established prior to reading that guide the children in the manner the classroom teacher decides. Presentations can be planned on the book that allow creative energies to write stories, poems, skits, and make posters and shoebox dioramas that best use the talents available within the group.. Two groups can be put together and guided while they compare and contrast the characters, setting, and major events in the story. Classroom discussion can tie the trade books in to the curriculum requirements for the topic. Similarities to events in the text can also be brought out at the same time.

Teachers planning on doing an integrated unit dealing with the Civil War may want to check into the following books for use with their class, even though this is a limited listing. Runaway to Freedom by Smucker is a historical fiction book written from the point of view of two runaway slaves traveling on the Underground Railroad. It is a book that treats the trip in a

very graphic manner, using terms no longer acceptable and explicit treatment of the runaways. I found this to be a book to read to the class so that discussion about the offensive terms could take place immediately Two other books dealing with the Underground Railroad and young blacks are by Joyce Hansen titled This Way Freedom and Out From This Place.

Another book dealing with this time period, but told from the point of view of a young southern boy, is The Perilous Road by Wm. O. Steele. It deals with the torn emotions that had split some families and put them on opposite sides of the fight. Teachers should also check out books that are definitely fiction, but show the point of view of young boys and also a woman. The books Charlie Skedaddle (Beatty), Shades of Gray (Reeder) and Behind Rebel Lines (Reit) are good sources of ideas for using comparing and contrasting the feelings and views of the main characters, since all have different outlooks relating to the war.

Besides the fiction about the era, you cannot forget there are fine biographies of the exciting real-life people of the time that are available. Look for Frederick Douglas, Harriet Tubman, Abraham Lincoln, John Brown and others. In the search for biographical material be sure to find books that views the era through the eyes of northerners, southerners, slaves free blacks and abolitionists. Students can read several books, both fiction and nonfiction, that would help in their understanding of the period.

Reading the trade books, using the social studies text as a basis, working in groups to reinforce the concepts, designing research projects, diorama themes, skits and role playing, and discussions will hopefully enable the students to master the skills required in the course of study. Taking the projects and delving into the economics of the time and the causes will help tie in the current affairs . Discussions, debates, and skits can be used to simulate what happened when the states seceded, when slaves runaway, and beliefs of the two sides.

Tying the social studies, reading and language into one basic subject and working in cooperative groups, will allow anyone to excel, because it uses many different styles of learning .Experts agree that the integrated approach is the best path to take at this point in education. It enables all students to learn and retain more. The natural integration of social studies, reading, and language will provide a high interest, high involvement approach to bringing the students to a love of learning and possibly bring out their natural curiosity about learning.

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